DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 099 046 JC 740 487

AUTHOR	Hudson, Robert L.
TITLE	PR: What the Media Expect from You.
PUB DATE	31 Oct 74
NOTE	9p.; Paper presented to the FACC Commission on Public Relations, Anniversary Convention Florida Association of Community Colleges (25th, Tampa, Florida, October 1974)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Colleges; *Guidelines; *Newspapers; Post Secondary Education; *Press Opinion; *Public Relations; Speeches
IDENTIFIERS	*News Releases

ABSTRACT

Guidelines for organizations to follow when submitting news releases to a newspaper are provided. These include the following: (1) when submitting a news release, put name, address, and telephone number on it; (2) don't submit lengthy, overly detailed news releases; (3) don't submit news releases that are incomplete; and (4) be accurate. (DB)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 099046

"PR: WHAT THE MEDIA EXPECT FROM YOU"

by

Robert L. Hudson

Executive Editor
Tampa Tribune

Presented to the
FACC Commission on Public Relations

25th Anniversary Convention
Florida Association of Community Colleges
Host Airport Hotel
Tampa, Florida

October 31, 1974

JC 740 487

The Tampa Tribune
MORNING AND SUNDAY

The Tampa Times
EVENING AND SUNDAY

ROBERT L. HUDSON
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

PUBLISHED BY THE TRIBUNE COMPANY
P. O. BOX 191
TAMPA, FLORIDA 33601

Thank you Billy Boyles,

It is with a great deal of pleasure I appear before such an august group as the Florida Association of Community Colleges to discuss your organization and the news end of the newspaper.

Perhaps a better title would be "How to get along with that grouchy city editor or, what newspapers don't want from you."

I should like to note at the outset we are dealing with one aspect of a duality. It is much like good and bad, black and white.

A discussion of what newspapers don't want in some instances becomes difficult to separate from what newspapers do want.

Basically, in my business, the editor is responsible for the separation of the two. He is the one who has been defined as the man who separates the wheat from the chaff and then prints the chaff.

I ask your indulgence then if I get some of the wheat and chaff mixed and traverse territory with which you are familiar.

We in the newspaper industry must face up to decisions periodically

and there are those who do not always agree our decisions are correct. No matter how hard we try, it seems that with some people, we can't do the right thing.

So, perhaps it would be appropriate if we made a candid examination of what a newsman is not. By understanding his problems, it may be easier to establish a working and profitable rapport with him.

Over the years, the dramatic media--movies, magazine and television--have created a newsman who has little basis in truth.

The picture of the newsman as a hard-drinking, self-educated cynical ruler of public opinion is wrong. Journalism today is a profession composed in most part of well-educated men and women who are devoted to their labors. They usually are family men--subject to the same joys of society as yourselves...kids, dogs, cats, little league and school hassles.

Professionally, however, he differs considerably from his neighbor. He lives by the clock, facing constant, inflexible deadlines in turning out the world's most perishable product....news.

The instant the press starts, the product loses its freshness and begins the short journey into history.

So much for the basic problems which face the newsman today. The obvious question is: Where does your organization and its news releases fit into

this picture?

A discussion of what newspapers don't want from your organization may be helpful then in bringing into focus the other side of the coin...a working rapport with the press.

A newspaper news room does not want to do business with an organization which operates its program in a muddled way. An organization should gear some of its top people to deal with the media and coordinate the program before trying to break into print.

I urge direction and singleness of purpose from within because from the editor's standpoint, it simplifies everyone's job. He feels he is dealing with a group which knows its own mind and this confidence spawns a positive attitude toward you and your requests. This may, at first thought, seem rather elementary. It is not. Not infrequently, one man from a department will contact the paper with a news item. The well-meaning second man, fearful his cohort slipped up, will bring in his or her version.

Often the two releases are handled by two different reporters or editors. Result is, when the paper comes out, duplicate stories appear. And, they always come out side by side.

This of course, is a boo-boo on our part, but grouchy city editors respond to such duplication with considerably less enthusiasm than a request for a picture of the mayor signing a proclamation for National

Radio and Television Week.

He knows the reader is not aware of the intricacies of how the bull occurred. On the contrary, he feels the duplication only solidifies the firmly-held opinion of some that those clods down at the paper don't know what they are doing.

There have been occasions when one group has submitted as many as four items on the same event. When this occurs, you may be sure that the organization involved is very apt to have its name stricken from the editor's good guys and gals list.

Now, if your group has a news project in mind which might require consultation, don't do as relatives do and "drop-in" just anytime... a good tip is to call the city editor, state desk or farm editor and set up a time. Your consideration will be appreciated...and it will pay dividends.

The tempo of a newspaper waxes and wanes as editions come and go... we at The Tribune put out seven a night. Editors are busiest at deadlines. This is not the time to "drop-by". Wives of our staffers have learned these are inappropriate times to call to remind their spouses to pick up a loaf of bread on the way home.

The editor's ulcers reach a peak at deadlines and callers are unlikely to obtain his best and considered judgments then.

Most editors are ready to discuss any legitimate problems you might have, but they do not welcome unnecessary consultations. In most cases, a news release can be submitted...and truthfully, a hand-delivered, or even mailed, news release is a dream.

Something is on paper and it can be discussed....But please--think of of a few basics...

Be sure, when submitting a news release---put your name, address and telephone number on it. There is a sound, utilitarian reason why newspapers have larger waste baskets than most businesses. Often news releases find their way into the "13" file simply because the newspaper was unable to contact the author of the release for a clarification or additional information.

Don't submit lengthy, overly-detailed news releases. Space is precious and the overwritten release has little chance of making its way into print. So, keep the story short, concise. Tell the story but avoid padding and excess wordage.

The length of the message is not necessarily related to the importance.

For example: The Lord's Prayer contains 56 words.

The 23rd Psalm has 118 words.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address contains 226 words and the 10 Commandments are set forth in 297 words.

A recent U. S. Government order on cabbage prices ran 26,911 words.

Don't submit news releases that are incomplete. Make sure Mr. Brown's first name isn't missing or that the day and time of a planned event haven't been ommitted.

You would be surprised how often a well-meaning group informs us by mail that something is going to happen at 7 p.m. The day of the event is anyone's guess.

Above all, be accurate. We make enough errors on our own.. We can fill our daily quota without assistance and it hardly brightens one's day to know his own errors have been compounded by those from someone else.

At the risk of stepping on toes, here I might sound a word of warning about going through the "front office" in search of publicity. The publisher, vice president or business manager may be an old buddy, but in the end, those amiable gentlemen see that whatever you brought in is passed along to the proper department.

All well and good. However, by the time your release gets to the editor, he realized you have by-passed normal channels and in his mind has grown the suspicion that you are seeking special consideration. At best, the front office approach can be interpreted as a lack of confidence in the editor and his judgment. Most will resent this sort of subtle intimidation. And the truth is that the high brass of the company also prefers that you deal directly with the news department.

Some of you may know it is not, but many laymen mistakenly assume the size of a newspaper and the amount of news content is determined by the editor. Other than days when stories of extraordinary importance arise, the news content of the paper is determined by the amount of advertising. There is a fixed ratio between inches of advertising and inches of news space.

The reason is fairly obvious. A newspaper, after all, is a business that must produce a profit for its owners or stockholders. The ratio between news and advertising is calculated to produce that profit.

This places a burden on reporters and editors. In a few short hours each day, they have the task of writing, editing and printing enough material to fill the average novel. Only a small fraction of the news pouring in each day makes its way into print. The editor must place this outpouring of material on the scales of news value and make judgments as to whether an item will be printed at all, and if so, at what length.

The culling and evaluating is a tedious task. It is the life-blood of the paper but still, your news items are given just as much thought as any other.

I could go on and on, but I realize I have given you a rather comprehensive list of don'ts. But the very nature of the beast makes the job of the public relations man and our job a demanding task. I

sometimes envy our counterparts in radio and television. Their mistakes and faux pas are gone with the wind. Our mistakes lie around the homes until given a merciful death as a wrapper for garbage or a catch of mullet. And inevitably, there is at least one reader with a sharp eye and little to do, who will beat us over the head with our mistakes in a "letter to the editor."

To these people, we remind them of the grand old man who lived to be 100, enjoyed good health and thousands of friends. Asked his key to longevity and friendship, he summed it up thusly: "I never run up stairs....or down people."

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

DEC 30 1974

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION